Ramph. Theol. T.

THE

MIRACLES

OF THE

IRVING SCHOOL

SHEWN TO BE

UNWORTHY

OF

SERIOUS EXAMINATION.

BY THE

REV. DAVID THOM,

FORMERLY MINISTER OF THE SCOTCH CHURCH, RODNEY-STREET, NOW MINISTER OF BOLD-STREET CHAPEL, LIVERPOOL; AUTHOR OF "THREE QUESTIONS PROPOSED AND ANSWERED," &c.

If therefore the whole Church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned or unbelievers, will they not say ye are mad. 1 Corinth. xiv. 23.

LONDON:

LONGMAN & CO.; LIVERPOOL, GRAPEL, CHURCH STREET.

1832.

R. Riddick, Printer, 3, Lord Street.

The following little treatise which owes its existence solely to the suggestion of my excellent friend

SAMUEL M'CULLOCH, Esq.

is, se inconsulto ac inscio, *dedicated to him.*

Liverpool, 14*th January,* 1832.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2015

https://archive.org/details/miraclesofirving00thom

THE

MIRACLES

OF

THE IRVING SCHOOL, &c.

WHAT IS A MIRACLE ?

TO this question a great variety of answers have been returned, and upon some of these curious theories have been constructed. Indeed, the vagueness of the notions commonly entertained respecting the subject, have rendered it a field in which sceptics and enthusiasts have alike delighted to expatiate.

A miracle, as the word imports, is something wonderful—something out of the ordinary course of things—something which, by the surprising nature of the circumstances connected with it, is deserving of and likely to command attention. Miracles, as understood by writers on the subject of religion, is that series of surprising and supernatural phenomena, recorded in the scriptures, by which the truth and divine origin of Judaism and Christianity were attested.

ARE MIRACLES TO BE LOOKED FOR AT THE PRESENT DAY ?

Understanding the question in one sense, I answer yes, in another sense, no.

There is a sense in which miracles not merely exist at the present day, but have continued to exist from the beginning of time until now.

I do not mean to allude to the regular recurrence of the seasons, to the exquisite structure of the human frame, or to the marks of divine interposition in the affairs of nations and individuals which every where meet the eye. All these are unquestionably very surprising, and justify the Apostle Paul in the assertion made by him at Lystra, that in no period of the world has God *left himself without witness.* Acts xiv. 17. These, however, are not the miracles of which I speak. *Cano majora.*

The grand miracle which has existed from the earliest ages, until now, is that of *men living in the world, who are not of the world.* Men, in whom, although clothed with flesh, and to outward appearance like others, there is a divine and supernatural principle, by their possession of which they are really and effectually distinguished from the rest of the human race.

This principle is, *the belief of the divine testimony.*

At this point my ears are assailed by the loud laugh of vulgar infidelity, or I am constrained to witness the half suppressed sneer which plays on the lips of more refined and philosophical scepticism.

"What! represent the belief of the scriptures—that which is the commonest of all principles—as something extraordinary, and therefore deserving the name of miracle! Do you expect any sensible man to pay the slightest attention to your statement."

Softly, my good friends. If the belief of the divine testimony were so very common as you suppose it to be, I admit that you would be entitled to despise it, and to despise me likewise, for representing it as anything marvellous. But before yonr assumption can be admitted, there is a previous question to be settled. Is the belief of God's word so very common?

"At all events the pretension to it is common."

Are you sure even of that? What if it should so happen,

that not only the belief of the divine testimony, but even the profession of believing it, is in reality the rarest thing in the world?

To believe *the testimony of God*, is evidently to believe it *as the testimony of God*. That is, to be satisfied or persuaded of the truth of any statement *on the authority of God*, is to receive it, not *as a matter of opinion*, but *as absolutely and infallibly true*. 1 Thessal. ii. 13. And this, because *if we receive*, or are convinced of the truth of the *witness of men*, much more must we receive, or be convinced of the truth of *the witness of God* which *is greater*. 1 John v. 9. That there is no possibility of the slightest doubt, hesitation, or uncertainty, with respect to the truth of the divine testimony, existing in the mind of him by whom it has been believed, may be thus proved. After assuming that the testimony of God, is greater or stronger than the testimony of man, let it be supposed that any doubt concerning the fact of God's having borne testimony to him, may remain in the mind of that person by whom the testimony of God has been believed in, and what follows? Why, that *the testimony of man* is actually greater than *the testimony of God*. For, man's testimony can in many cases produce a conviction *so strong and so completely exclusive of doubt, as to be scarcely distinguishable from absolute certainty*, and yet, according to the terms of the supposition just made, the conviction produced *by the testimony of God*, which is *greater or stronger than that of man*, is actually, *not so great or strong as the conviction produced by that of man!* The supposition, therefore, is clearly inadmissible. Nay, the truth of the converse of it is abundantly manifest, that if the testimony of man, when believed in, can frequently produce a conviction *so closely approximating to absolute certainty as to be scarcely distinguishable from it*, the testimony of God, as greater than that of man, must, when believed in, produce, as its legitimate and necessary effect, *absolute certainty itself*. The belief of the divine testimony, then, thus completely demolishing and annihilating doubt, how many, pray, believe the scriptures, not *as the word of man*, but *as the word of God*?

"Vast numbers believe them in this way."

There you are mistaken. The number of persons who, with absolute certainty, receive the scriptures as divinely inspired and infallibly true, is extremely limited. Of those who make a profession of believing them, the great majority, like the biographer of Lord Byron, conceive, that "humble doubt, so far from being inconsistent with a religious spirit, is perhaps its best guard against presumption and uncharitableness."* Several, on the ground of external evidence, or human testimony, may attain to a conviction of the truth of the sacred volume, which, by the mere natural mind, is not to be distinguished from absolute certainty. But to have God himself bearing witness in the conscience to the truth and heavenly origin of the scriptures, is a privilege which falls to the lot of few—very few indeed.

And the reason is, that to few is it conceded to see the scriptures in the only light in which they can be *certainly* apprehended as true and divine, namely, *the certain personal interest which they themselves have in the promise of everlasting life which they contain.*

"Do you mean to say, that none believe the divine testimony *as such*, that is, *as certainly and infallibly true*, but those who believe, *without the slightest doubt or hesitation, that God has given eternal life to themselves personally?*"

I do, for *this is the record*, that is, the very testimony itself which we believe, *that God hath given* TO US *eternal life; and this life is in his Son.* 1 John x. 11.

Nor is it possible for us to receive the scriptures as divine, or, on authority superior to that of man, in any other way. For, as we can receive nothing upon the authority of a being with whose nature we are unacquainted, in order to our receiving any statement or promise upon the authority of God as the testifier, we must know him, that is, understand his nature or character. Farther, his character when understood, must be understood as what it is, namely, LOVE, and love can only be understood through the medium of seeing love borne towards ourselves personally. By this simple and scriptural process, we arrive

* Moore's Life of Byron, Vol. 1.

at the conclusion, that it is only in consequence of our apprehending the love which God bears towards ourselves personally, that we become acquainted with his character—and that it is only as acquainted with his character, that we receive any statement, declaration, or promise on his authority. His character as the testifier is manifested to us through the medium of his testimony—and his testimony is seen to be true in the light of the new and divine character as the testifier with which it makes us acquainted—the character of the testifier, and the truth of the testimony, both shining into our minds at one and the same moment, by means of our apprehending as addressed to ourselves personally, the promise of everlasting life, which the scriptures are the channel of conveying to us. *God is* LOVE, and, *in this was manifested the love of God* TOWARDS US, *because that God hath sent his only begotten son into the world, that* WE *might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved* US, *and sent his son to be the propitiation for* OUR *sins.* 1 John iv. 8. 9. 10. See also verses 16th and 19th. Under these circumstances, how impossible to separate from the belief of the divine testimony, the belief of our own personal and beneficial interest in that testimony?*

"Now we understand you, and at once concede to you, that very few either believe with certainty their own personal interest in everlasting life, or make a profession of believing it. They who do so, must be the most irrational of intelligent beings. What are the whole of your statements but a specimen of that vicious mode of argumentation, commonly known by the technical appellation, of *reasoning in a circle?* Oh no! Mankind in general, from the avidity with which they gulp down the absurdities of their religious instructors, lay themselves open to a charge of egregious folly, but fools as they are, they are not so great fools, as believing with certainty God's love to themselves personally, would prove them to be."

This concession of yours is enough for my present purpose. Few, in your opinion, believe, certainly and unhesitatingly,

* See Barclay of Edinburgh *on the assurance of faith.*

that *God hath given to them eternal life*, and it appears to you extraordinary and unaccountable, that any man should be found to do so. But, as a miracle is something which cannot be accounted for on natural principles, is not your concession equivalent to admitting, that for any man to believe, with absolute certainty, that *God hath given to himself personally eternal life*, is, according to your own view of matters, *a miracle?*

And a miracle indeed it is.

This infallible certainty of the truth of the divine testimony existing in the mind, through the medium of, and in connection with, the infallible certainty of God's love to ourselves personally, is possessed by very few. Is not uncommonness one of the characteristics of a miracle?

It excites surprise that any should possess, or should avow their possession of such a principle. But is it not essential to a miracle, that it should create astonishment?

There is nothing in nature, or in the effects produced in the mind by ordinary evidence, corresponding to that infallible certainty of eternal life, which is the result of believing the divine testimony. Why, it is the very point which I am labouring to establish, that to produce this certainty of eternal life, surpasses the power of ordinary evidence. *The evidence* and *the effects produced by it*, are, in the case in question, *both supernatural.* And does not *supernatural interposition* enter into every definition of a miracle?

Of the miracle implied in conveying to the mind *the belief of the divine testimony*, we, who are *the children of God by faith*, have no hesitation in avowing ourselves to be the subjects.

We are not ashamed to adopt as our own, with some slight alterations, the sneering remark of one of the acutest of modern metaphysicians, expressing our conviction with him, that "the Christian religion not only was at first attended with miracles, but even at the present day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one." Nay, that as "moved by faith to assent to *the divine testimony*, *we are* conscious of a continued miracle in *our* own persons, which, *as respects the ground on which we hope for eternal life*, subverts all the *natural* principles of *our* under-

standings*, and gives us a determination, *or rather absolutely constrains us*, to believe what is *altogether* contrary to *the* custom and experience *of an unbelieving world.*"†

We are satisfied with the Apostle, that in conferring upon us the belief of the truth, there has been displayed the same *exceeding greatness of* God's *power, and the same working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places.* Ephesians, i. 19, 20.

We see *the gate* of faith to be *so strait*, and *the way* to be *so narrow*, that the circumstance of any man's getting into it, is as astonishing, as that of *a camel passing through the eye of a needle.* But our own experience is to us a comment upon the words with which Christ accompanies the proverbial saying just quoted, that *the things which are impossible with men, are possible with God.* Luke xviii 25, 27.

It is true that the generality of mankind, and even of religious characters too, are disposed to laugh at us and our profession. *How can these things be?* is their question. Well, instead of there being any thing extraordinary in this, the matter of surprise to us would be to find worldly characters acting otherwise. High authority has informed us that *the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*, and, therefore, so far from being surprised at the manner in which both the religious and the irreligious treat us and our profession, the miracle to us would be, to find *natural men* receiving *spiritual* views, and to have the declarations of scripture in regard to them thereby proved to be untrue.

This principle of *faith in the divine testimony*, as a *testimony addressed to every one who believes it*, has existed from the

* The *natural* ground of hope is *our own personal righteousness.*— Genesis ii, 16, 17. Matthew xix, 16. Acts xvi. 30. Rom. x. 3. The *supernatural* ground of hope is *the righteousness of the Son of God.*— Genesis iii. 15. Rom. v. 21, x. 4. I. Corinth. i. 30, 31. 2. Corinth. v. 21. In passing from the former to the latter, we are conscious of undergoing a complete revolution.

† Hume's Essay on Miracles. The alterations made are in Italics.

earliest ages until now. It is *the standing miracle of the church of God.* It does not, to be sure, suit those whose incessant cry is, *we would see a sign from Heaven,* but it is perfectly satisfactory to those *who are themselves the subjects of it. He* who, by faith, *hath the* divine *witness* or testimony *in himself,* I John v. 10, and who, from the identity between the views of divine things disclosed in the Scriptures, and his own views of them, has *the spirit itself bearing witness with his spirit, that he is a child of God,* Rom. viii. 16, feels no desire to have the sacred volume contradicted, by seeing the kingdom of God, and those who belong to it, held in repute by an unbelieving world. His faith which is *the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen,* Heb. xi. 1, prevents him from acting the part of Passion in Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, and enables him to wait patiently for the realisation of the divine promises *at the resurrection of the just.*

The principle of faith does not enable us to *subdue kingdoms,* as the Old Testament Saints sometimes did, Heb. xi. 33 ; but, what is far better, it is a principle possessed of which *we subdue the world and ourselves.* Proverbs, xvi. 32, I John, v. 4 5. Human nature is in us, exactly what it is in every other descendant of Adam, and we know that it neither will nor can undergo any change, until *this earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved.* 2 Corinth. v. 1: But if faith cannot *change* human nature, it at least can *control* and *overcome it.* We, with all that are *Christ's, have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts.* Gal. v. 24.

Faith does not enable us *to raise the dead to life again,* Heb. xi. 35 ; but, what is of far more importance, it is *the resurrection of ourselves from death unto life.* John xi. 25, 26. Ephes. ii. 1—8. It is to us *the present communication of life everlasting.* John, iii. 36, v. 24, xvii. 3. I John, v. 12. *As everlasting life,* it is a principle which, once possessed by us, *can never come to an end.* It is not like what is frequently denominated faith among the ignorant and enthusiastic, a principle which to-day may be, and to-morrow may have passed away ; on the contrary, he to whom the character of God *as Love,* has once been revealed through the medium of *his own*

testimony, and to whom this revelation has been made, in the light of the fact of *eternal life freely bestowed upon himself personally through the finished work of the Son of God*, I John, iv. 9, is possessed of a source of blessedness which, so far from being exhaustible, is in him *a well of water springing up into everlasting life*. John iv. 14.

But the point of view in which the miraculous nature of faith is perhaps most clearly discernible, is that of *its setting the mind perfectly free from priestcraft of every description*. John viii. 36. In thus expressing myself I speak advisedly, for my observation of mankind has taught me, that infidelity has its priestcraft, as well as religion. Whatever enables any man, or set of men, to work unduly upon the fears of their fellow men, whether they be fears of ridicule, or fears of Hell, I have no hesitation in stigmatizing as *priestcraft*. Now who is he that is raised above all fears of men,—all dread of their ridicule and their threatenings,—but he who believing the divine testimony knows *certainly and infallibly*, that *he has in Heaven a better and an enduring substance?* That *suffering with Christ here, he shall reign with Him hereafter?* Such a man requires neither the curtain of privacy to be drawn around his death-bed, as is alleged respecting Voltaire, and some other characters of the same stamp, nor the attendance of the Priest with his *viaticum*, and similar trumpery, as is practised among the votaries of the church of Rome, and certain other churches which would not exactly like to be classed along with her. God himself having spoken peace to the conscience of the believer, through the medium of his own most blessed word, who is man that he should be able either to invalidate, or confirm the heavenly privilege? He who knows *by faith*, that is, *by having the divine witness in himself*, that in resigning his present paltry existence, he is about *to be absent from the body, to be present with the Lord*, what cares he for those who either *directly* by sceptical reasoning, or *indirectly* by suggesting the necessity of his performing some strange mystical ceremonies, in order to the perfect satisfaction of his conscience, would try to shake his confidence in the promises

of his Heavenly Father? No. Living and dying the believer sets at defiance all the assaults of scepticism, whether it assume an open, bold, God-defying front with Paine, Taylor, and Carlile, or put on the more secret, serpent-like form of insinuation worn by the ordinary classes of religionists—undisguised infidelity, Romish superstition, and the cant of Methodism, are all alike kept aloof by him—and led on in the evenly tenor of his way *from grace to grace* and *from strength to strength*, by that increased mental illumination, which as it began with, so it is only carried on by the scriptures opened up to his understanding by their divine author, he is at last brought *to see the King in his beauty, and the land which* to the eye of sense *is afar off.* Amidst *those tossings to and fro with every wind of doctrine,* and those displays *of the cunning craftiness of men whereby they lie in wait to deceive,* which on every hand abound, is there nothing miraculous in the fact of a few individuals passing through the world, totally unaffected by the opinions of men in regard to religion—with consciences sealed to *human views* of the matter, but open continually to the entrance of *the word of God*—and thus safely and infallibly conducted by *their Heavenly Father* himself to *the realms of glory.* ?*

"Is *the belief of the divine testimony* the only miracle which you recognise in modern times?"

No. Faith, although the prime, the distinguishing miracle of the Christian, as it was of the Jewish Church, Heb. xi. *throughout,* has for its constant and inseparable attendant, *the gradual fulfilment of prophecy,*† a miracle which shall continue to be obtruded on the reluctant notice of the world till the end of time. This miracle is exhibited in the three following ways:—

First—The existence of the Jews at the present day, as a people distinct from all others, and cherishing sentiments of

* See Barclay *on the Assurance of Faith.*

† "All prophecies are real miracles, and as such only can be admitted as proof of any revelation: If it did not exceed the capacity of human nature to foretel future events, it would be absurd to employ any prophecy as an argument for a divine mission, or authority from Heaven."—*Hume on Miracles.*

hostility to Jesus of Nazareth, as decided and inveterate as ever.*

Secondly—The very small number, comparatively speaking, of those who from among both Jews and Gentiles believe the gospel—the existence of a large anti-christian or spurious church, which, from the earliest ages until now, has continued to grow up along with the true church—and the opposition still given by all classes of men, whether pious or profane, to the doctrine of *eternal life unconditionally bestowed through Christ Jesus upon the children of men.*

And, thirdly, the progressive spread of the knowledge of the gospel throughout the world, and the progressive advancement of the minds of believers in the understanding of the sacred volume—a circumstance not only in accordance with numerous direct prophecies, but of itself constituting a beautiful analogy between natural and spiritual growth.

My readers are now in a great measure prepared to understand the sense, in which, if the question be put to me, *are miracles to be looked for at the present day?* I answer No.

Whenever the word miracles is used, the generality of mankind immediately conjure up the ideas of *giving sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and the power of walking to the lame, healing the sick, raising the dead, speaking with tongues,* and matters of that sort. There is nothing remarkable in this, as it is the only view of the subject which *the natural mind* is capable of taking. But it certainly is remarkable, that the circumstance of any view connected with religion being *congenial to the natural mind*, should not at once excite suspicions of its incorrectness in those who as believers of the truth must know, that *the things of the Spirit of God cannot be apprehended by a mind in its natural state.* 1 Corinth ii. 14.

"Is it the import of your last remark to deny, that the miracles enumerated by you in the preceding paragraph are greater than the communication of the principle of faith?"

* Should any of my readers be desirous to see *the argument from the fulfilment of prophecies* brought out in all its lustre, by a reference to the past and present circumstances of many other nations besides that of the Jews, he cannot do better than consult Bishop Newton's learned and laborious work *on the prophecies.*

If, by *greater miracles* you mean, more calculated for the moment *to rouse attention and astonish the natural mind,* I admit that *to raise a dead man to natural life,* is *a greater miracle* than *to believe the gospel.* If, however, by *a greater miracle* be meant, *one in which divine power is more conspicuously displayed,* and *which when understood is more calculated to produce a permanent impression on the mind,* then *the belief of the truth is the greatest of all miracles.*

Without entering into all the *minutiæ* of the case, it may be proper to observe, that every man who believes the divine testimony, does so, not *in pursuance of,* but *in opposition to his natural feelings, tendencies, and ideas.* Unless this were so, there would be nothing miraculous in his faith ; and unless his faith were miraculous, Scripture would be untrue. John iii. 3, 2 Corinth. v. 17. Every man's mind prompts him, naturally and necessarily, to seek for and attempt to obtain the divine favour, by his own personal righteousness. Even the great majority of those who are serious and pious and evangelical, in the estimation of themselves and the world, are found, like the Jews of old, *going about to establish their own righteousness, not submitting themselves to the righteousness of God.* Rom. x. 3. In the state of mind of such persons there is nothing *supernatural,* and therefore nothing *miraculous.* When the divine testimony, however, is carried home to the conscience of any man by faith, he is raised to views of divine things essentially different from those which occupy *the mere natural mind.* Instead of continuing to aim at the establishment of his own righteousness, either openly or covertly, he is inspired with *a good* because certain *hope through grace,* founded on his seeing himself to be one with the Son of God, and thereby interested in his divine and perfect righteousness. *Christ is* now to him *the end of the law for righteousness.* Rom. x. 4. This knowledge that *Christ is his righteousness,* not only imparts perfect peace to his conscience, Rom. v. 1, but, strange and paradoxical as the assertion must ever appear to be to *the natural mind,* becomes in him, henceforward, the principle of personal righteousness. Rom. viii. 3, 4. Perceiving that he is already *accepted in the beloved,* Eph. i. 6, his obedience

no longer springs from the *selfish* motive of a desire thereby to earn for himself the divine favour, but from the *generous* motive of *love to God* as having *first loved him.* 1 John iv. 19. And not only so, but as a believer, *he cannot sin.* Unbelief is the principle of all evil, and therefore in the mind of the unbeliever nothing but evil does or can dwell. Mat. xii. 31, 32, John iii. 18, 19. From the conscience of him who believes, however, this principle is, by the introduction of *the righteousness of God,* at once and necessarily expelled; and as unbelief cannot gain admission into a conscience occupied by the divine righteousness, the existence of evil and its necessary attendant condemnation in the conscience of a believer is, thenceforward, absolutely impossible. 1 John, iii. 9, Rom. viii. 1. To believe the divine testimony, then, implies a complete change, a complete revolution, in so far as religion is concerned, in the state and circumstances of the mind. Instead of being swayed by *natural,* the conscience of the believer is swayed by *supernatural views, feelings, and principles.* He is, as to his mind, *created anew.* 2 Corinth. v. 17, Eph. iv. 23. But if so, he is the subject of a miracle; nay, of the greatest of all miracles; for, as *the mind* is acknowledged on all hands to be superior to *the body,* can it be questioned, that in *the new creation of the mind* there is a far greater display of divine power, than in that greatest of all other miracles *the restoration of natural life to the already organized body?*

The fact is, there is not a greater proof of the ignorance of the Scriptures, and the carnal nature of the sentiments of those who call themselves Christians at the present day, than that morbid craving after external miracles, which the Pharisaical portion of them exhibit. *A sign from heaven,* as it was the oft expressed desire of the Pharisees of old, so it is the grand object of the longing of our modern devotees. A greater sign than any that they require, even *the new birth—the new creation—the resurrection from death unto life* of those who believe the truth, is continually presented to their notice, John iii. 2, 3; but, like their Jewish prototypes, as they do not believe the inspired writers, so *neither will they be persuaded although one rise from the dead.* Luke, xvi. 31.

Little are our modern miracle hunters aware of the extreme folly and childishness, as well as criminality of their procedure.

" Miracles, in one sense of the word, subsisted in the church, for at least three hundred years after the commencement of the Christian era, and what is there to hinder them from being performed now ?"

Foolish people that you are ! Is it possible that you can be ignorant of the consequences in which by this mode of reasoning you involve yourselves, as well as of the groundless nature of the assumption which you make ?

To direct your attention to one or two of the consequences of your reasoning. Are you aware, that many of the worst corruptions and abominations of the church of Rome, had been introduced in the second, and that many more were in existence in the third, centuries of the Christian era ? That men calling themselves the followers of the Lord Jesus, had even then begun to attach a superstitious importance to the sign of the Cross—to receive the doctrine of *the real presence* —to invoke Saints—to put up prayers in behalf of the dead—to seclude themselves from the world by retiring to caves and deserts, a practice which soon degenerated into monastic institutions—and so on ? And are you aware, likewise, that many, if not most of the miracles said to have been performed during the second and third as well as following centuries, were performed in proof and honour of these corruptions and abominations ? If not, it is right for me to acquaint you that this was the case, and that if you will receive the miracles, you must also receive the doctrines and practices, which it was the object of these miracles to establish. They both stand or fall together.* Nay, I must acquaint you further, that it is out of your power to decline receiving the particular miracles which to you may appear to be suspicious, seeing that all the miracles of this period come down to you upon one and the same authority. My dear *Protestant*

* This " shows what reasons the Romish church hath to espouse, and the Protestant churches, if consistent with themselves, to suspect and disclaim" such miracles.—" If we admit the miracles, we must assuredly admit the rites for the sake of which they were wrought ; they both rest on the same bottom, and mutually establish each other:—Conyers Middleton's *Introductory Discourse to his Free Enquiry.*

friends—if in reality you deserve this honourable appellation—are you aware, that in order to be consistent with yourselves, your next step from the reception of the miracles of the second, third, and fourth centuries, must be into the embraces of the Church of Rome?

Another consequence of admitting the miracles of the second and third centuries is, that so far from being able to stop there, you must admit those of a subsequent period likewise. For upon what authority do you receive the miracles of the second and third centuries? Upon that of the Romish Catholic writers and ecclestastical historians, to be sure. But do not the same writers and historians inform you, that miracles have, on suitable occasions, been wrought by the clergy and laity of their church, from the period where you are desirous to stop until now?* And are you to be permitted to cut and carve upon the testimony of your witnesses? To receive this, and to reject that part of their statements? Would you be permitted to act such a part in regard to the evidence delivered in any court of justice at the present day? Would you be permitted to charge the witnesses with gross prevarication, or rather positive falsehood, in the great bulk of their testimony, and yet to declare that you regarded them as perfectly trustworthy persons in certain matters, concerning the truth or falsehood of which, but for what they say, you could have no knowledge whatever? Let me inform you, that if you make any concessions whatever to the Roman Catholic Church on this subject, you will find it to be utterly impossible for you to draw the line of distinction between the period when true miracles ceased, and that when spurious ones began. Many Protestant writers who have made the attempt have, in the estimation of every well informed and judicious person, miserably failed. Besides, there is no point in regard to which such writers are more decidedly at variance with one another than this. While the majority of them with Mr. Dodwell, close their list of genuine miracles at the period of the conversion of the Roman empire to Christianity, that is, about the beginning of the fourth century; Mr. Whiston

* See Milner's *end of religious controversy*.

and Dr. Waterland, two of the most celebrated names in English theological literature, carry them on till the end of that century; Dr. Chapman asserts that the fifth century had its portion of them; and Dr. Berriman, in one of his sermons, allows, that the miraculous powers of the church were exerted till the end of the sixth century. And shall Protestants, by admitting the existence of the miracles of the second and third centuries, thus involve themselves in the necessity of admitting those of a subsequent period? Shall they thus unwittingly play the game into the hands of the Church of Rome? *Proh pudor!*

But, putting consequences aside, the assumption of miracles having existed in the second, third, and fourth centuries, is utterly groundless.

During the period between the completion of the canon of scripture, about A. D. 70,* and the time of Justin Martyr, about A. D. 140, are supposed to have lived and flourished, Barnabas, Clemens Romanus, Hermas, Ignatius, and Polycarp, commonly called the Apostolical Fathers. Epistles, and fragments of other writings ascribed to them, have reached our time.† In works so very ancient as these, we may expect to meet with constant references to miracles. And yet, curiously enough, with the exception of one or two passages of exceedingly dubious import, their authors, persons generally supposed to have lived the nearest to the time of the Apostles, prefer no claim to the possession of miraculous powers themselves, nor speak of miraculous powers as possessed by others!‡ Is not this quite inexplicable upon the principle of miracles having then been of every day occurrence?

* The Book of Revelation was written before the destruction of Jerusalem, A. D. 69. The hypothesis of its having been composed during or subsequent to the reign of Domitian, about A. D. 96, has evidently arisen from confounding John the Presbyter with John the Apostle.

† The English reader, acquainted with the word of God, may satisfy himself concerning the nature of the trash which these men wrote, or rather are said to have written—for I have great doubts as to the genuineness of some of the writings ascribed to them—by consulting Archbishop Wake's translation. The Shepherd of Hermas is a precious piece of nonsense.

‡ I shall not, I presume, be twitted with *the voice*, *the flame*, and *the dove*, of Polycarp's martyrdom. Although not particularly scrupulous as to the miracles which they swallowed, and capable of digesting the rest of the narrative alluded to, *the dove* appears to have been rather too much for the voracious maws of Mr. Dodwell and Archbishop Wake.

By Justin Martyr, who lived about A. D. 140, mention is made of miraculous powers as then existing, and the note which he sounds is taken up by Irenaeus, A. D. 180, Tertullian, A. D. 200, and the other *Fathers*, as they are called, who succeed. But who are the men that vouch their authority for the existence of miracles in their time? And what is the nature of the miracles which they have detailed to us? The answers which must be returned to these questions will be found to be any thing but favourable to the cause of apocryphal miracles. The Fathers, upon whose authority the miracles rest, appear, notwithstanding the estimation in which they are held by the Church of Rome, to have been ignorant, credulous, and bigotted—to have had their minds seasoned with a *quantum sufficit* of knavery—and not to have been over and above disposed to stick at a trifle, where their own personal consequence, or the interests of their party were concerned.* And as were the men, such also were their miracles. Absurd, childish, fraudulent. Dreams and visions—pretended cures of pretended diseases—and conjuring tricks in which the Christian exorcists strove to outdo the heathen magicians—are, without the slightest exaggeration, the categories under which the whole of them may be classed. Nay, what is more than any thing else calculated to beget suspicion even in the least reflecting, is, that the miracles reported to us by

* No doubt, in most of the qualities enumerated in the text, Papias stood pre-eminent. But that the other early Fathers are not to be exempted from the charge of fraud and folly which I have brought against them as a body, Justin Martyr's forced, far-fetched, and fanciful interpretations of scripture, mistakes of inscriptions, confidence in magic, genealogy of demons, and more than suspected forgery of the Sybilline books—Irenaeus' story about the old age of Jesus, and frequent appeals to the traditions and testimony of the Apostles in support of the most absurd and incredible doctrines—appeals which have constrained Dr. Whitby to say concerning him and Papias, to whom the charge equally attaches, that "they have shamefully imposed upon us by the forgery of fables and false stories;"—the pretended visions by which Cyprian attempts to justify his having declined the crown of martyrdom—and many other circumstances well known to those who are familiar with the writings of these men and their cotemporaries—afford but too numerous and melancholy proofs. The conduct of the Fathers justifies completely Middleton's caustic remark, that "the greatest zealots in religion, or the leaders of sects and parties, whatever purity or principles they pretend to, have seldom scrupled to make use of a commodious lie, for the advancement of what they call the truth."

the Fathers, instead of having been wrought by themselves,* or in their presence, seem, on their own shewing, to have reached them as matter of hearsay, and in that shape have been handed down by them to us. "A great number of miracles were wrought about this or that time?" When? where? how? it is in vain to inquire. There is a most remarkable indisposition, or rather inability, on the part of the reporters, to supply us with names, dates, and other particulars†. But this is not all. In considering the internal evidences of miracles, we must take into account the purpose for which they are said to have been performed. When I peruse the narratives of miracles recorded in the scriptures, besides the intrinsic excellence of the miracles themselves, I am struck, forcibly struck, with the beautiful connection subsisting between them, and the wise and benevolent ends which they were evidently intended to answer. But when I read of infants, whose lips had been profaned by food offered in sacrifice to idols, refusing to swallow the consecrated wafer, and of fire issuing from places in which it had been confined—of visions indulged to Christian sisters for the purpose of prescribing the exact length and measure of their veils—of beasts of prey assisting Anthony the monk in the burial of his companions—of Saints informed by visions that their relations were suffering in the flames of purgatory—of water changed into oil by Narcissus, Bishop of Jerusalem, that the sacred lamps might be supplied at the time of Easter, &c. &c.—and all this to establish the doctrine of *the real*

* It is a curious fact, that while Irenaeus is loud in his boasts of miraculous powers having been enjoyed by the Church in his day, about A. D. 180, he confesses that, under circumstances where the possession of the gift of tongues would have been extremely useful, he found himself destitute of it; and it is equally curious, that at the very time when he was claiming for his cotemporaries the power of raising the dead, his friend Theophilus Bishop of Antioch, being urged by Autolycus a heathen, to raise a dead man, as the most speedy and effectual way of removing his scepticism, was obliged to confess his inability to do so.

† "None of these *venerable Saints*," the Fathers, "have anywhere affirmed that either they themselves, or the Apostolic Fathers before them, were endowed with any power of working miracles, but declare only in general, that such powers were actually subsisting in their days, and openly exerted in the Church—that they had often seen the wonderful effects of them—and that any body else might see the same whenever they pleased; but as to the persons who wrought them, they leave us strangely in the dark."—*Free Enquiry, &c.*

presence—the divine approbation of *celibacy* and *monastic institutions*—the *existence of a state of torments from which disembodied spirits may, by the sacrifice of the mass, be released*—and the necessity of attaching an importance to *a Priesthood of man's device*, which is due only to *the Great High Priest of our profession* himself—can I allow myself to be so far imposed on, as to put stuff like this on a level with those proofs of immediate divine interposition which stand recorded in writings inspired by the Holy Ghost? Can I admit that a Being of infinite truth and wisdom was from time to time interposing miraculously, for the confirmation of a scheme of fraud and folly? Can I believe that miracles, such as those which the Fathers relate to me, ever existed?

——— Credat Judæus Apella,
Non ego.

The fact is, whether we consider the *external* or *internal* evidences of the miracles of the second, third, and following centuries, in both they appear to be woefully deficient. Can I be far wrong then in stigmatizing such miracles as part of a system of barefaced imposture?

I am satisfied, and every man acquainted with the sacred volume who takes the trouble to investigate the matter will soon come to be satisfied likewise, that we have no authentic record of *a single miracle*—in the sense in which the term is commonly understood and employed—having been performed since the days of the Apostles, or, at all events, since the death of the last person, upon whom, by the imposition of their hands, miraculous powers were conferred.

It will not be to confute my reasonings to tell me, that as regards the miracles of the second and following centuries, I have been merely retailing the statements of the sceptical Conyers Middleton. Although it was by the scriptures themselves, that my first suspicions of the miracles in question were excited, I admit, that to a subsequent perusal of Middleton's able and well reasoned treatise,* I have been indebted for such a distinct and comprehensive view of the subject, as has

* *A Free Enquiry into the miraculous powers which are supposed to have subsisted in the Christian Church through several successive centuries.* By Conyers Middleton, D.D.

enabled me to present it in the shape which I have done to my readers. I admit, likewise, that Middleton was a sceptic. The question, however, is not *what was Middleton?* but *what has he proved?* Has he succeeded in destroying that structure of fraud and delusion which, originally reared by the Fathers and the Roman Catholic Church, learned Protestants, alas! unworthy of the name, have subsequently been found lending their most strenuous efforts to prop up? Has he completed what Luther and his immortal coadjutors, by withdrawing the attention of men from the juggleries of Popery, and fixing it upon the inspired volume itself, so gloriously began? I have no hesitation in saying, that I think he has. His work, although I allow not so intended, appears to me one of the best vindications of the step taken by our fathers at the period of the Reformation. I scarcely know a more essential service which some spirited publisher could render to the Church at the present day, than bringing out a new edition of the *Free Enquiry.**

But it is not enough to have disproved the pretended miracles of the second, third, and following centuries. It is necessary to the perfection of my treatise, that I should show likewise the impossibility of what are commonly considered miracles being wrought by any person now in existence.

This I do by means of the following scriptural arguments.

First—By reminding my readers that genuine *miracles*, in the sense in which the term is commonly understood, have always been wrought in proof, and with a view to the establishment of a divine Revelation.

The reason of this clearly is, that the man who in any one respect performs works to which human nature of itself is incompetent, by that very circumstance authorises, nay, obliges all who witness these works, to receive whatever communication he may see meet to make to them, as having the same origin which the works themselves have. In other words, the works become, under such circumstances, a seal or attestation of the divine commission which he bears. Thus reasoned Ni-

* Some of Middleton's remarks on *tongues* and *healings* would be found to be peculiarly seasonable.

codemus, John iii. 2. Thus reasoned a greater than Nicodemus, John v. 36, x. 25, 37, 38, &c. &c.

Upon this exceedingly plain and obvious principle, miracles attested the divine origin of the Mosaic dispensation, and of the various prophecies which from time to time were delivered during the period of its continuance. Upon the same principle, miracles were employed in superseding the dispensation of Moses, and setting up that of the Messiah.

Now to come to the point.

Has God any dispensation to set up additional to that of the Messiah? If he has, then, reasoning analogically, he will introduce and confirm it by miraculous interposition, and for miracles under such circumstances I am fully prepared. But will any man venture to say, that the dispensation or reign of the Messiah, which, according to scripture, is to be perpetual —which is *to last as long as the Sun and Moon endure*—is, notwithstanding, during the existence of this present world to be superseded by another? If any man shall do so, he *may* find dupes disposed to listen to him, but he must not be surprised if all who love and reverence the inspired volume, turn a deaf ear to his asseverations.

Again, has God any thing to add to the canon of scripture? Has he any new revelations to make—any additional prophecies to deliver—any more persons *to move by the Holy Ghost* to the composition of divine, perfect, infallible records? If he has, then I am prepared for miracles. The miracles wrought by the Apostles, demonstrated the divine power and authority by which they spoke and acted, and the obligation under which those to whom they addressed themselves lay, to receive with implicit confidence, whatever they might commit to writing. Now if God is going to make additions to the canon of scripture; and if either Mr. Irving, or Mr. Bulteel, or Mr. Taplin, or Miss Hall, or Miss Cardale, or Miss Macdonald, or any other person, is to be the honoured instrument of conveying these to the Church; then I am ready to listen to the *unknown tongues* of our modern prophets, and to consider the various other ways in which they may attempt to accredit their divine message. It will not be the strangeness and uncouthness of the

sounds uttered by them—it will not be the suggestion of the leading Journal of the British Empire, that *the unknown tongue* is "Hebrew yelled out with a Polish accent"*—it will not be the charge of combination and conspiracy in getting up the whole matter, made by a discarded confederate†—that will deter me from candidly examining into the pretensions of the devotees of the New School. Nay, in the case supposed, I am content to waive any advantage which I might derive from the fact of *the tongues* spoken by the Apostles and early Christians, having been not *unknown*, but *well known*.‡ But if, as is actually the case, I find upon the face of the scriptures themselves declarations that the inspired volume is complete; and if, especially, I find it closing with the denunciation of a curse against any man that shall add to, or take away from the words of the divine prophecy; Mr. Irving and his followers must hold me excused, if—the possibility of any supplementary revelation being thus out of the question—I decline troubling myself with the examination of miraculous powers, which I know could only be genuine on the incredible hypothesis of my Heavenly Father having neglected, eighteen hundred years ago, to make some communication to the Church, and being now resolved to supply the omission.

But this is not all. Let me hint to the modern votaries of delusion, that the converse of the proposition upon which I have been insisting, is equally true. If new revelations imply new miracles, new miracles likewise imply new revelations. If Mr. Irving and his followers have performed, or are capable of performing a *single miracle*,§ they come to us as accredited divine messengers, not requesting our attention as a matter of courtesy, but demanding it as a matter of right. It is no longer in our option to listen, or not to listen to them. At our peril we turn a deaf ear to their statements. Nay, in that case, any

* Leading article of the *Times* (London) *Newspaper*, Thursday, 15th Dec. 1831.

† See Pilkington's *unknown tongues discovered to be English, Spanish, and Latin.*

‡ Acts ii. 6—11. See likewise the Greek of the 14th chapter of the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians. I would respectfully hint to the English reader that the word *unknown* is in Italics.

§ In the ordinary sense of the term.

declarations which they may please to make, *stand upon a level with those which are contained in the inspired writings themselves.* As workers of miracles they give us the same proofs of a divine mission which the prophets and apostles did, and are entitled to the same power and authority over our consciences, which we concede to these genuine servants of the Most High. Now, let me ask the thoughtless creatures who have allowed themselves to be ensnared by modern pretensions to miraculous power, if they have ever, for a single moment, reflected on these necessary results? If they have ever reflected, that supposing Mr Irving to be another Thaumaturgus—another miracle worker—their consciences are henceforward in his keeping? Perhaps they have not, and therefore let me hope, that the hint now given may, in some cases, not be unseasonable.

To this plain consequence, then, the asserters of modern miracles are reduced. It being obvious, on the highest of all authority, that the power of working *external* miracles, is the seal and attestation of a divine commission, if Mr. Irving and his followers have wrought or are capable of working such miracles, they furnish us with evidence the most conclusive and irresistible that they are the bearers to us of a message from Heaven. In that case, so far from being *ordinary* Christians, they stand upon a footing with the Prophets and Apostles themselves. As such their explanations of the scriptures are authoritative, nay, what they declare, being of the nature of new revelations, fall to be regarded by us as a most valuable addition to the inspired volume. Henceforward we must bind up the lucubrations of Mr. Irving, and the other modern prophets, with the present contents of our Bibles! But are our religious wiseacres prepared for this? If not, let them stop in time; for, most assuredly, the only alternative is, either unhinging the canon of scripture, by admitting, as of equal authority with it, the miracles, and thereby the reveries of modern fanatics and enthusiasts; or, by means of *the word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit,* beating down, as absolutely inconsistent with it, every pretension, by whomsoever made, to the possession of what is commonly understood to be miraculous power.

Secondly—The performance of what are commonly considered miracles at the present day, would indicate not an advance, but a retrograde motion on the part of the Church.

I prove this, by referring to the argument prosecuted by the Apostle Paul, throughout the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth chapters of his first Epistle to the Corinthians.

The Corinthians appear to have prided themselves in the idea of possessing miraculous gifts, to a degree superior to that in which they had been conferred upon any of the other Churches. The Apostle does not exactly dispute this claim of theirs. But he devotes the three chapters abovementioned to shew, 1st, that, as all these gifts proceeded from one and the same source, and were all indispensable to the attainment of the end aimed at, the conduct of persons who possessed what were deemed the superior gifts, in treating with contempt those whose gifts were regarded as inferior, was as foolish as it would be for such parts of the human body as are confessedly superior, to despise the inferior parts and to suppose that any of them could be dispensed with. Chapter 12th. 2dly, That there was a principle superior to all these miraculous gifts, viz. Love, which the Corinthians in the pride of their hearts had but too much overlooked. Chapter 13th. And, 3dly, That admitting a superiority of some miraculous gifts over others, the Corinthians had committed the blunder of preferring the inferior to the superior. Chapter 14th. It is in the 13th chapter—in which he demonstrates to the Corinthians the superiority of the divine principle of Love over all the miraculous gifts of which they were so vain—that the Apostle brings out the argument of which I now avail myself.

This superiority is threefold. First, apart from Love all these miraculous gifts are worthless. It is only as expressions of Love that they have any value or efficacy. Verses 1—3. Secondly, Love is superior to those gifts by its very nature, or, when we consider the effects of which it is productive. 4—7. Thirdly, The superiority of Love is chiefly manifest in this, that although other gifts are to pass away, that is, after having fulfilled their purposes, are to come to an end, *Love is to exist for evermore.* 8—13.

It is this last position, or the transient nature of what are commonly called miraculous gifts, as contrasted with the perpetuity of Love, which gives a death blow to the Irving miracles.

This will be evident, if the language of the Apostle, from verse 8th to the end, be duly considered.

"You Corinthians," as if the Apostle had said, "pride yourselves on the possession of extraordinary gifts, and that to a degree in which they have been conceded to no other Church. Now, although I have no wish or intention to deny that these gifts are most valuable, and that in your present circumstances they are subservient to purposes the most important, allow me to give you a hint or two which may tend to abate your pride and self-complacency. First, these miraculous gifts, so far from being destined to be of long continuance, are speedily coming to an end. *Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.* Verse 8. Now, what is to be enjoyed but for a short time, cannot, it is clear, be of so great importance as what is permanent. But, secondly, if *the mere fact* of these miraculous gifts ceasing proves their inferiority to Love, which is a permanent principle; *the reasons* for their cessation demonstrate this still more forcibly, and render your folly in priding yourselves on them still more apparent. These reasons are, first, that the churches are now," (I am supposing the Apostle to address the Corinthians,) "in an imperfect state as to the communications of divine truth which they are receiving. *We know in part, and we prophesy in part.* Verse 9. The churches are obliged to depend for instruction as to the meaning of the Old Testament scriptures, upon the inspiration, from time to time, of persons belonging to their respective bodies, who, having only particular portions of these scriptures opened up to them, are necessarily *prophesying only in part.* But I have to hint to you, that a period is rapidly approaching, when God will cause a complete explanation of the Old Testament scriptures to be committed to writing, by us his Evangelists and Apostles, and then shall your miraculous gifts, as only necessary till

the arrival of that period, that is, in the absence of the New Testament scriptures, or a sufficient portion of them, pass away. *When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.* Verse 10. Now, how foolish to think thus highly of gifts, the necessity of which, instead of proving you as a church to be perfect, prove you, on the contrary, to be in a state of great imperfection ! Secondly, In regarding with self-complacency the miraculous gifts which you possess, you expose yourselves to a reproach of which you are but little aware. Pap, swaddling clothes, leading strings, and so on, are things which cannot be dispensed with while we are in a state of natural infancy ; but it is not customary to find grown men boasting that they still require and make use of such things. What should we think of a man of mature age priding himself in his rattle, or his doll, or his rocking-horse, or the other toys and trifles by which the mind is amused in the earlier stages of existence ? What should we think of such a person lisping, and prattling, and indulging in those humours and fancies, which we expect and make allowances for in those who are only beginning the career of life ? Such conduct is, of course, out of the question in the case of any man of sane understanding. *When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child ; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.* Verse 11. And now, Corinthians, will you allow me to apply this illustration by hinting to you, that as the necessity of miraculous gifts proves the church to be in an infantine state, so by the boasts which you make on the score of your possessing such gifts in an eminent degree, you prove unwittingly the infantine state of your minds as to spiritual things. You are just like children challenging their little companions to produce as many toys, and other appendages of a state of infancy, as they can. This information will, no doubt, be extremely galling to your pride, and yet it suggests the only apology which can be made for you." Having accomplished enough for my present purpose, I leave the intelligent reader to fill up the rest of the apostolic argument.

Now for the application of the foregoing to the pretensions of our modern miracle workers.

Mr. Irving and his coadjutors, unless prepared to make common cause with the Church of Rome, must admit, that if not in the first, at all events in a subsequent age, the miraculous gifts of the early Christians were withdrawn. As predicted by the Apostle, *prophecies failed, tongues ceased, and knowledge* vanished away.* But a cessation of miraculous powers having once occurred, is there a single passage contained in the New Testament scriptures which declares, that these powers should afterwards be renewed and restored? Nay, how, consistently with the argument of the Apostle, could a renewal and restoration of them take place? Be it remembered, that it is as connected with, and as the marks and indications of spiritual infancy and imperfection, that, in the passage which we have been considering, they are spoken of. But a state of *spiritual* infancy having once come to an end, how, any more then a state of *natural* infancy, can it afterwards be renewed? That state of imperfection in which the Church was, when, in consequence of its not possessing the New Testament scriptures, it stood in need of the occasional miraculous inspiration, and the other miraculous powers of its members, having been superseded by that state of comparative perfection, which is connected with its possession of the whole of the sacred records—what probability, nay what possibility is there, of its again exhibiting powers, the very existence of which would imply that it had been carried back to its former state of imperfection? As soon as the writings of the Evangelists and Apostles, in which we have a complete and infallible revelation of the character and will of God, and a complete and infallible explanation of the Old Testament scriptures, came to be circulated among the Christian Churches, miraculous gifts, as no longer necessary, immediately ceased—and are we to suppose that God, after having, for seventeen or eighteen hundred years, taught his Church by means of the New Testament scriptures alone, as the *perfect* privilege, by which the *part* or *imperfect* privileges were to *be done away*,

* The gift of infallibly interpreting, by direct occasional inspiration, the Old Testament scriptures—a gift, of course, only requisite until a complete and authoritative interpretation of these scriptures, such as we have in the writings of the Evangelists and Apostles, had been given.

1 Corinth. xiii. 10, is now practically bringing a charge of imperfection against his own most blessed word, by exhibiting it as, *of itself* and *without the aid of miraculous gifts*, insufficient for the comfort and edification of his people? And yet, whether understood to be so or not, this is actually the import and tendency of all modern miraculous pretensions. Those by whom they are made, represent the church as, not in a *progressive*, but a *retrograde* state! As having reverted from a state of things which is *more*, to one which is *less* perfect—as having been carried back from *a comparatively mature age*, to its former circumstances of *childhood and imbecility!* And this too, in the teeth of the scriptures themselves, which shew us, that ever since the infancy of the Church in Eden, it has been in a state of constant, uniform, and progressive advancement! Can any thing then prove more satisfactorily, the impossibility of miraculous gifts existing and being exercised at the present day, than that the hypothesis of their being so, besides attacking the sufficiency of the New Testament scriptures, necessarily carries back the church to the lispings, and prattlings, and babblings of infancy?

Thirdly—We have direct apostolical authority for affirming, that what are commonly regarded as miracles were confined to the first ages of the Christian Church.

Strangely enough, our proof of this is a passage, in which it is declared that these miracles should take place in *the last days*.

Such is the deplorable and almost incurable inattention of mankind to scripture, and such consequently their ignorance of its contents and meaning, that what I am now going to state, although lying on the very surface of the sacred volume, will, it is but too probable, be new to most of my readers. *The latter days* of the Jewish, were *the former days* of the Christian Church. Our blessed Lord did not, at the period of his ascension up on high, bring the Old Testament dispensation immediately to a close, but allowed forty years to elapse before that event took place. This period of suspense constituted its *old age*, during which, as the Apostle expresses it, it was *ready to vanish away*. Heb. viii. 13—these were its

latter days. It was during this period that all the New Testament writings were composed, and it was during this period, therefore, that all the genuine New Testament miracles on record were performed.

That *the latter days* of the Jewish dispensation, corresponding to *the infancy* of that of the Messiah—and not *the latter days* of the Christian dispensation—was to be the period for the outpouring of what are commonly called the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, is thus shewn.

In the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, we are made acquainted with a very extraordinary event. The descent of *cloven tongues like as of fire*, upon the heads of the Apostles and disciples when assembled on the day of Pentecost, and their being enabled thereby to speak not *unknown* but *well known languages*, which they themselves had never learned. The Apostle Peter, in addressing the multitude whom this circumstance had brought together, took occasion, first of all, to quote a very remarkable prediction of the Prophet Joel, in which, according to the Apostle, that inspired writer had foretold, that miracles, such as those which they then beheld, should characterise *the last days*. *But this is that which was spoken by the Prophet Joel, And it shall come to pass in the last days (saith God) I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh, &c.* Verses 16, 17. That is, as if the Apostle had said, "in this miraculous outpouring of the Spirit, and the effects which are flowing from it, behold a fulfilment of Joel's prophecy, and a proof that the period now existing is *the last days*." Here I put Mr. Irving and his friends upon the horns of the following dilemma. Either the Apostle Peter has not given us an inspired and infallible interpretation of Joel's words, which of course they will not affirm; or, in denominating the period at which he spoke *the last days*, he must have meant *the last days of the Mosaic dispensation*—it being obvious that the miracle which we are considering occurred, not in *the last* but *the first days of the dispensation of the Messiah*. This being admitted, it follows that the miracle of tongues, and the other miracles foretold by Joel, were destined to take place, not *now*, but *then*—and that even although Mr. Irving

could prove *the present* to be *the last days* of the Christian dispensation—which he cannot—it would afford no proof whatever that such miracles were to be looked for *now*. Joel's prophecy was, as Peter declares, fulfilled *in his time*, or, *in the last days of the Mosaic Economy*—a circumstance which precludes the possibility of its remaining to be fulfilled *now*.

Those, then, who insist on the possibility of miraculous gifts existing and being displayed at the present day, must, first of all, contrive to get rid of Peter's interpretation of Joel's prophecy, which fixes down the possession and exhibition of miraculous powers to *the last days* of the dispensation of Moses, a period which we have seen corresponded to *the first days* of that of the Messiah.*

On these grounds, then—first, that God has no new revelations to commit to writing—secondly, that the existence at the present day of what are commonly called miracles, would shew the Church to be in a *retrograde* instead of an *advancing* state—and, thirdly, that inspired authority has assigned not *the latter days* of the Christian but *the latter days* of the Jewish dispensation, (a dispensation which came to an end nearly eighteen hundred years ago), as the period when miraculous gifts of the nature of those in question were to be conferred—all of them, it will be observed, *scriptural* grounds—do I at once and decidedly dismiss the miracles of the Irving school, without deeming it necessary, under such circumstances, to trouble myself or my readers with any enquiry into their nature. Whenever God speaks to my conscience from his own *lively oracles* the scriptures, I find myself perfectly safe in rejecting, without the

* I may here remark, by the way, that one grand reason for external miracles having occurred in *the last days* of the Jewish, and *first days* of the Christian, dispensations is, that the former having been set up by means of such miracles, could only with propriety be put down by means of such miracles likewise. The Supreme Being having openly and visibly, by signs and wonders, shewn himself to be the Author of the Old Testament dispensation, thereby virtually pledged himself to give the same open and visible attestation of his having abrogated and superseded it. But as the New Testament dispensation is never to be set aside—as it is destined to last as long as time itself—the particular reason just mentioned for external miracles having been wrought *in the infancy of the Christian church*, cannot be pleaded as a reason for their being wrought *at any subsequent period of it*. Is not this a strong argument against the probability of any such miracles now existing ?

slightest hesitation, as mere foolish boastings, empty pretensions, and gross delusions, any counter claims which may be set up by the most talented from among the children of men.

It cannot be sustained as a valid objection to the view presented by me in the foregoing pages, that "the grounds on which I reject the miracles of the Irving school, are grounds from which even the miracles which I admit are assailable." For, there happen to be some *important*, I should rather say *essential* differences between the one and the other—differences which take *the belief of the divine testimony* out of the predicament in which, what are commonly called miracles, necessarily stand. *External miracles* wrought at the present day, would imply that the church had been carried back to a state of childhood—whereas, the more that *the truth as it is in Jesus* is understood and believed in, the more are the members of the church advancing towards maturity. *External miracles* are calculated to produce an impression on *the natural mind*, 1 Corinth. xiv. 22—whereas *the miracle of the belief of the truth* is connected with, nay is itself the creation of *a supernatural mind*, 1 Corinth. ii. 14, 2 Corinth. v. 17. *External miracles* always taking place through the medium of human agency, cannot be performed without exciting in *the natural mind* a tendency to give to those who perform them a respect which is due to God alone, Acts iii. 10—12. xiv. 11—15. besides that the power of working them is liable to many abuses, 1 Corinth. xii., xiii., xiv.—whereas *the miracle of faith*, deriving its origin solely from the word of God, Rom. x. 17, and consequently having God himself, speaking through the medium of that word, for its author, wherever it is wrought God and not man necessarily gets all the glory. Is it possible to help perceiving, in these few contrasts, some very substantial reasons why *the belief of the truth* cannot be ranked with, nor share the fate of *external miracles?*

No more will it answer the purpose of Mr. Irving and his followers to assert in opposition to me, "that there is as much scope for *an act of faith* now, as there was in the first ages of Christianity; and that to him who puts forth such *an act of faith*, all things are possible." *An act of faith* upon what?

I know nothing upon which faith can legitimately be exercised, except the declarations and promises of the word of God. To attempt to rest it upon any thing else is the height of presumption, as well as arrant folly. But upon what divine testimony or testimonies can such a miracle-working faith as that which Mr. Irving and his friends contend for, be exercised? Not upon Mark xvi. 17. 18. For, the promise contained in this passage was, we know, fulfilled, in every particular, in the apostolical age; and if Mr. Irving shall contend that it was meant to be applicable to every succeeding age likewise, (as universally interpreted it must be), he becomes bound to reconcile this with the fact of no fulfilment of it having taken place for centuries.—Not upon James v. 14, 15. For, that faith, the prayer of which is in this passage declared to be efficacious to the recovery of the sick, is evidently the faith spoken of in 1 Corinth. xii. 9, and must, therefore, like the rest of the miraculous gifts enumerated in the context of that verse, have, in process of time, passed away. These two passages then being abstracted—passages evidently referring to a state of things which was peculiar to the first ages of the church, and which consequently no longer exists—upon what can persons, who pretend to the possession of miraculous powers, now rest *their acts of faith?* Why, upon nothing more than vain surmises of their own, that, although after having answered some very important ends under certain given circumstances, miraculous powers did along with these circumstances come to an end, it was not that their cessation might be perpetual, but that they might again appear, and might again be exercised by Christians under circumstances totally different! But in the absence of any express, unqualified, divine testimony, that miracles after having once ceased were to be renewed and restored—are the mere surmises of men to be regarded by us as a suitable and sufficient ground-work for *an act of faith?*

A few words more and I have done.

Let me hint to those who know the truth, the necessity of a little more caution and circumspection, than have been evinced by some of them in regard to this matter. Many of them

require to be reminded, I fear, that there is such a thing as a *noviciate* in Christianity. 1 Tim. iii. 6, Rom. v. 4. A little caution—a little "trying of the Spirit" by that unerring standard the Holy Scriptures—at the present moment, may obviate the necessity for much bitter repentance afterwards.

Pretensions to the possession of miraculous power, similar nay superior to those set up by Mr. Irving and his followers, are not new. The *French Prophets*, after having by their tremblings—and faintings—and trances—and cries for mercy—and exhortations to repentance—and denunciations of wrath—attracted a great deal of notice abroad—about the beginning of the last century, found their way to the city of London, where they contrived to make some hundreds of converts. But the event proved that their temporary success had been the result of artifice and delusion. Their history is matter of record. *Sat verbum sapienti.*

I do not require to be told that, if duly attentive, the believer may see the hand of God in every thing. I know it. Nay, I am aware of the fact, that in so far as *our petitions are according to* God's *will, he heareth us.* 1 John v. 14. But I know, also, that God has no where pledged himself to answer our petitions, when we pray for what is *in opposition to his will*, or presume to urge him to bestow upon us *certainly*, what he has only promised to bestow *conditionally.* Above all, he has not promised to answer us when we venture to pray for any thing *without a warrant or authority for so doing.* In no part of his word has he declared, that after the cessation of miracles, it is his purpose to renew and restore them—and, therefore, as faith can only refer to, and rest on what is testified, *to pray for miraculous gifts cannot be to pray in faith.*

I have little or no acquaintance with the science of medicine, but this I know, that neuralgic complaints, and diseases the cure of which is more or less dependant on the imagination, are still in a great measure a *terra incognita* to Physicians. It is a matter within the experience of every medical man of tolerably extensive practice, that the most unexpected recoveries, in cases of the kind alluded to, are from time to time taking place. The knowledge of this fact should render both

professional men and others, exceedingly cautious in concluding from their inability to account for the cures of relations and acquaintances, that such cures must be *miraculous*.

But to bring the whole matter to a close. "The evidence for the miracles having been performed," say Mr. Irving and his followers, "is so strong as to be absolutely irresistible." So, in reference to their miracles, say the followers of Prince Hohenloe. So, about a century since, said the persons who conceived themselves to have been cured by visits paid to the tomb of the Abbé de Paris. So says the Church of Rome. If you have at hand Milner's *end of religious controversy*, you will find that able and zealous advocate of *the Mother of Harlots* declaring, that, so far from being easily gulled by pretensions to miraculous power on the part of her members, as Protestants are taught to believe, there is nothing so minutely examined and so thoroughly sifted by her as the alleged miracles of those who are brought forward as claimants for canonization; and that to such an extreme, indeed, is this carried, as to have caused it to pass into a proverb, *there is nothing so difficult as to prove a miracle at Rome*. And yet miracles, we know, are from time to time substantiated to the complete satisfaction of the Papal chancery. Well, how do I deal with these? Why I just oppose to them *the shield of faith*. However unable I may be to point out the circumstances of fraud in which they originated, or the means by which the Romish church has contrived to render them plausible, I know, upon the principles already stated, *that they cannot be true*. It is impossible for God to set the seal of his veracity to a system of falsehood and imposture; and therefore I am satisfied, without any examination of them, that Popish miracles, like the system in support of which they are adduced, *must be the offspring of the Father of lies*. And in the very same way do I deal with the miracles of Mr. Irving, or any other person calling himself a Protestant. Knowing, upon the authority of the scriptures, that *they must be false*, I at once throw them overboard. My Heavenly Father has no more occasion for Protestant than for Popish priestcraft to advance his cause—and yet what but priestcraft would be the gainer, in the event of such miracles

as those now contended for being actually performed? *The truth as it is in Jesus* would not be promoted thereby, for it, despising all human and adventitious support, stands fixed and immoveable, upon the authority of the scriptures alone. But the glory of man—the credit of Mr. Irving and his friends, as the inspired and infallible messengers of the most High—would be much advanced, could it be shewn, that they were in reality endowed with miraculous powers. And yet is it to be supposed that He who in every past age has, by means of the language and conduct of his true and only ambassadors, marked his disapprobation of priestcraft of every description, is now all at once altering his procedure, and lending to that deadliest foe of man the authority of his divine sanction? That He who caused Peter and John at the beautiful gate of the Temple, Acts iii., and Paul and Barnabas at Lystra, Acts xiv., to disclaim in language the most energetic, and with considerable risk to themselves, all personal merit in the cures which they had performed—and to make use of these, not as so many claptraps, or means of attracting popular applause, but as the appropriate *media* of directing the attention of men to the doctrine of *Christ and him crucified*—is now giving to uninspired man, an authority over the consciences of others, which, except in so far as they uttered the words dictated by him to them, he withheld even from his inspired servants themselves? No, truly. None but Christ *the High Priest of our Profession* is Lord of our consciences, and none but he, therefore, shall by his word be permitted to reign there. All other authority in spiritual matters we abjure and disclaim. Being all of us as believers of the truth invested with the priestly character, Rom. xii. 1, Heb. xiii. 15, 16, and knowing that our priesthood has been conferred upon us by the Great Head of the Church himself, Rev. i. 6, we cannot allow ourselves to be tricked out of this our invaluable privilege, by any individual or set of individuals possessed of a priesthood, emanating either directly or indirectly from the Church of Rome, and conferred by the hands of man.

THE BIBLE, THE BIBLE ONLY, IS THE RELIGION OF PROTESTANTS.

To be had of William Grapel, Charles Gray, and the other Liverpool Booksellers, the following Publications by the Author:

1. REMARKS by the Rev. DAVID THOM, Minister of the Scotch Church, Rodney-street, Liverpool, on a Series of Charges recently preferred against him, before the Reverend the Presbytery of Glasgow, by certain Individuals connected with the Management of the said Church. With a copious Appendix. 1825.

2. MEMORIAL submitted to the Presbytery of Glasgow, by the Rev. DAVID THOM, regarding the Theological points of his case. Second Edition. 1825.

3. A LETTER to the Rev. RICHARD T. P. POPE, adverting to some important Mistakes committed by him in his recent Controversy with the Rev. THOMAS MAGUIRE. 1827.

4. THREE QUESTIONS Proposed and Answered, concerning the Life Forfeited by Adam, the Resurrection of the Dead, and Eternal Punishment. 1828.

5. RECENT CORRESPONDENCE between the Presbytery of Glasgow and the Rev. DAVID THOM, occasioned by a second interference on their part with him. 1828.

Soon to be published by Subscription, by the same Author, in One Volume octavo,

THE ASSURANCE OF FAITH, or Calvinism identified with Universalism.

[R. Riddick, Printer.